

A note of thanks to those who've let me think

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To my own surprise I am slowing down for Christmas. My university time sheet (yes, we have them because I am EU funded) will record that I am on holiday today, even if I suspect that some thinking will go on nonetheless.

And that's my point: slow can be good. Whilst I have little doubt that I will be blogging in the next week, because asking me not to blog is like asking me not to breathe, I need to slow down from my work precisely because after a fairly crazy year professionally I need a little perspective on what has happened, and need to be prepared for a new year that already offers more trips abroad in the first few weeks than I really think to be wise.

It was George Bernard Shaw who said:

Few people think more than two or three times a year. I've made an international reputation for myself by thinking once or twice a week.

I'm making no claims as to how often I think. But I do believe that thinking takes time, and we don't make enough time for it. I have, for example, no idea how or when politicians get time to think because their schedules are always too packed for them to ever have the chance to do so. That's good explanation for why they are so event obsessed and so often way behind where the public are on issues of importance.

Not that the public spend enough time thinking either. There was an interesting comment from a woman in south Wales on the news a day or two ago. She said she had honestly expected to see the impact of the UK leaving the EU within days of it happening and was disappointed that nothing appeared to have happened as yet. Just a little thought would, surely, have made it apparent why this was unlikely to have been the case.

And we all spend a lot of time avoiding thinking. Apart from work, television and IT are massive suppressants of thought. They needn't be: if time was taken to reflect they could do the exact opposite. But when the best bit of going to see a film or play is, for

me, discussing it afterwards, television provides instead another, immediate, offering and that chance is all too often taken away. Thinking is taken out of the equation.

That's why my dog plays a big role in my working life. Hector gets daytime walks when I'm stuck. He doesn't know that, and I'd rather you didn't tell him. As far as he's concerned I'm just full of magnanimous generosity for his wellbeing, but the truth is that twenty minutes dedicated to thinking an issue through is often enough to see things in a different way and to save a lot of time overall.

Which is why a while ago, when I was given an award for my work I made the point in the acceptance speech that I was grateful to funders who had taken the risk of paying me to look out of the window. Most don't do that. They do instead want an event, a fixed output, a tangible goal achieved or some other milepost when offering funding when what is so badly needed is thinking.

This then is a chance to say thank you, to the Friends Provident Foundation and to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust for letting me look out of the window for the last six or more years. Without that time and the freedom they gave me to develop my thinking on issues around tax and accounting and their impact on poverty in the political economy I would not be where I am this Christmas. I am truly grateful.